

NIGHTSPACE, LIGHTMIND

POEMS

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Green berries burgeon in the hill's blue heart
Beneath a sky where burning white clouds drift,
Invisible cicadas' tuning fork
Of heat, the world so still, radiant and calm;

The visible insignia of light
spark on green domes crumbling, awash;
Rising heat shimmer in the bright field's midst --
resonating tines, small voices sing.

A yellow filter set across the world,
Sun blaze is steeping time in fragrances;
Walking I am there and I am here,

My step uncertain in the stiff current
Of grasses tangled, dry, woven, breaking
All around me as I drag them forward.

The clarity of space this afternoon
As all of sunlight fills the summer's world –
Warm smell of light on dusty bricks
From the old chimney dumped in a ditch of vines.

Four of us play at killing horse flies.
Board slats painted across a red brown mare –
Beyond a ways there is a dark stable,
Above the stable steep sky pounds with heat.

A sky of fathomless light blue above
A white rim of mid day down near the hill –
And the sun burns right into our necks

As we take the blue flies and the green flies
That are like pieces, chips of bright metal,
Smashing these fragments of sun between two bricks.

Father took me to the boat house once,
We spent the evening fixing the engine.
Fumes from it made a white heavy fog
That settled just above the water line.

We moved about in a toxic sun mist,
The engine like a hot stove between us,
Covering our faces with our shirts –
I passed tools to a voice without a face.

Crouching underneath the smog we put
Sharp questions tapped out on metal pipes
To fellow prisoners – wheels, gears and belts,

Then father sent me out to get fresh air
And I wondered how long he'd stay in there,
Trapped in poisonous fumes and machinery.

The snowfall closes all the eyes of trees,
Touches deeply the waking disrobed earth
And wraps it in a new warmth, cold to touch,
Though warm to being: for so long it falls.

Into the frozen crystal of the night
It brings reviving sleep, a bright amnesia,
The old world left behind, a new held back,
Bestowing its abundant emptiness.

Hollowed out by cold and by the dark,
I lie here in my bed and try to make
My life, myself, as absolutely empty

As I can: hollowed I want to be more
Still, stilled I want to be more hollowed out,
A shell to fill up with a true unknown.

The night's dark music in the ear of time
Circles its sea shape in the conic sun
That watches space on all sides through the hush
Of its blindness, its blood-hidden light.

And yet the mantis on the leave's green shell,
Comes surfing in, will break its many loves
Into smear-bandaged, iv'd casualties
Waiting for opiate viaticum.

My body a junk yard in which I pick
And poke my way among the casualties,
The stark precise unenviable wrecks,

I try to ascertain which bit might serve
To figure a sound first line response
To shatters of blue glass and sun-dried blood.

The multitude of loaves that crumble in the field
Soak up the light that showers from the sun
And dark hosts of the seen and bright unseen
Gather among dust eddies and wind-jars.

These hold the bright impalpable, the touched
Untouched, and all the powers of the earth;
Caesar is uncaesared here, steel made rust,
Amid the pummeling of light and drought.

Walking through the field here I thought
Of those who crossed from little into more,
A somewhat more; exiguous having.

Once real in the world that's pitiless,
And flesh and bone, with shoes upon their feet;
With feet that walked, or tried to, the whole way.

Night fishing in the bay, the lantern globes
A bowl of honey part way down, and there
Three fish are sleeping in reflected light,
Watched by our mirrored faces shimmering around.

And then we lower a curled bright worm
Into an amber cone, their clouded bedroom,
Trying to entice them out into the dark,
The deep green water, mysterious, running.

Wobbles of surface oil catch the light
That hotly burns, with white bugs, near our faces,
Our net a framed and frozen crying out.

Extended poles are like two feelers
From a roach-dark boat. What are we looking for?
After a little longer, we turn off our lamp.

The oval night is filled with moth-shaped dreams
The color of the peppermint green rain that falls
Into the streetlight's shower stall of dust,
White dreams of sugar, satin, and black beads,

Delicate confections, rouge enigmas,
Beneath which I must make my way hands out,
Touching the silken brail of dark walls,
The acupuncture needles of their script.

Hold to the light as to a drowning man
Amid the swelling onrush of the night,
A prickling vertigo will take you down,

But then, as is recounted, let you rise
Three times: the first is for the sun-dropped seeds
To wet your face, then for the seeds to dry, then for the
scaled mask.

Kneeling underneath the moon-dark slate
That drops its pomegranate seeds of light
Deep into the runic blood-marked dawn,
We wait for the field's flowers to appear,

Pale white beneath the gentian of the sky
That smears its cryptograms of graying stars
Against the unwashed board of empty space,
And then awakened earth resumes its dream.

Flowers grow larger, sharper, the white thistle too
Is like a hacked off stubble left behind
By visitors, the deep nocturnal ones,

Who monitor and ratify our dreams;
Bringing their laden coats of bright metal,
Their spiders made of beads, their polished stones.

Deep in the well's black morning glory sheen
Where oil and enigma flash their onyx bright
Mascara case of mirrors, dark lashes
Of presentiment and green iris dark,

The eyes are lured out beyond the edge
Where windows, water eyed, can never save
The dream from its descent, still less the dreamed,
And where the saving footstep cannot fall.

I have been lured there twice, and then three times,
Drinking the juice of peaches with the lamplit pit
Sucked out between the two tenacious globes;

But now I've given up my toy balloons.
If anybody wants them now, they're yours.
A white narcotic peace is my last love.

The effervescent ball amid the barroom's dark
Broadcasts its beams of drinking straws that pierce
The frozen slush -- a slow-stirred crowd
Perfumed with sweat, hashish, and black perfume,

Searching out susceptible green hearts
Like a harvest man, a daddy long legs,
Wanting to suck the marrow and the blood,
Leaving the flyblown head and eaten crotch.

A small three-legged dog walks in the door
That's left wide open to the lightning wind;
The light has been orange tinfoil all day,

And rain-sweat, seeping here in the coal's precinct,
Has set the hosts of heaven secretly in town
Amid the dust and low beds and paired nails.

The blue cornflower viscera of dawn
Is opened with caesarean of light,
Ripped open on the rooftops' lizard scales,
The screaming babe apocalypse still born,

And absolutely silent, wild as dust
That blows soot galaxies through the alleyways
Where the gold grease of hamburgers and fries
Has spilled into brown diarrhea pools;

Take it or do not take it, damn-ed town
Coagulated into raked mud tracks
Where all the blood of youth and masculinity

Is poured on tap into the urine pools
That hold the bright foam, the rising ferment,
Where bloodshot eyes are stamped into new wine.

The gold-grained wheat within the baking bread
Is filled with greenest grass, with clearest rain,
With blackest soil burning in the sun
That dries and warms it a full handful deep.

The yellow straw that's spiking up the fields
Blossoms in honey bees that buzz the shed
With combs of fragrant sugar, and the tall
And hot pink gladiolas fill their heart valves

With glistening and bright barley through the day
And purple butterflies so hot in threaded lights
Their green stitched into tapestries of sun,

And cloud-lit waters where the damsel fly
Gathers its sea blue from the sky's high fires,
And in the brown woods of the pond the small birds sleep.

Skin crepe paper of the gladiolas' script
Written in distilled, illuminated sweat
Is spread in ripples through the sunblind light
That bathes the eye in tears, a dirty rain

Poisoning the soft depths of the pond,
And touching on the reaches of the skin.
The seed froth of the thick stems cannot reach
Beyond a foul and ancient tangling.

Swathed under diapers of the gray sunset
The luminous and absolutely bogus king
Lets flow his blood and water to the streams,

The milky pinpoints saddling the earth.
Yet laid down in the hothouse windows
The radiant gold cells will rise at last.

Tomatoes, green squash, beans and pepper plants
Fall from the sunburned trees in round bushels,
Brothels of the summer wave spread wide
Their streaming legs into the soil's embrace

And offered all their orifices to light,
Opening their secrets seed by seed,
Clutching the golden tangling of vines,
The open hands of flowers, sulfur yellow.

Platinum and sun-pollen hair: I have come back
To the soft fabrics of the leaf-shaped world
And touched the stems and green vines, root by root,

Weighing the burden of their life and fate,
Touching , inhaling, feeling what is there,
And yet, still, can never feel it as it is.

Closed eyes in the mud count all the moons
That pass above them, light spotted night,
Pulling their heavy bands of living weight,
The spangled denizens of sand blown zodiacs

Dropping their burden to the hollowed earth,
The earth of dreams, of tangled unseen paths
That branch into the green and chess piece wood,
Throwing their shadows into spider webs.

Do we walk on earth or lightly, lightly
Touch it, as though afraid of some contagion,
As though to test some deep mud with the sole?

The earth has bells attached, the silver
And the gold; the painted domes and lucent glass.
Yet what can it be to us, all weight and viscera?

The cold rain falling through glass willow trees
Feeds starfish constellations in the sun-branched roots
So that the diamond and jade talismans
Of worldly fortune and responsive hope

Move through the mirror back where rational desire
Is warmed and watered by blue printed snow,
Where memories have left their chain link tracks
And ripened figs are gathered in soft arms.

Blood-filled traffic knocks the bird bone wall.
It is not this that I touch with fingertips
But shells of all night-singing strands,

Opening their silence to astronomical light,
Unconscious and yet calling to all realms,
And past them, to dimensions all unknown.

The floods that move the standing trees around,
Black islands of green birds that weave themselves
Amid the branches' multitude and liquid eyes,
Project a quiver full of x-rays through the night;

They follow underground and spiral streams
Known only to the hollowed-out initiates,
The partly living and yet partly dead,
Sheltered in canopies of blood-stained cloth,

Who still from their condition draw insight --
The culpable and garish snapshot signs,
If light-scratched pictograms are really signs,

Although their bright duplicity marks them:
The image-ridden squandered chemicals
Amid the networking, the incendiary cash.

Stair steps strewn with roses, red and black,
Lead into the tower where the empty
Grapefruit colored light illuminates
The severed head-piece of a small black ant,

Surrounded by anthills made of saltpeter,
Gray and black-tipped gulls' feathers,
And hourglasses made of sucked out
Bodies of faint millers; parchment stiff,

Like dusty dry leaves scribbled on
By Benedictine priestesses, hermaphrodites
Of gathered parliaments, portioning the earth;

But in the hourglass of the poison oak,
The birds now hanging in the glasses' waist
Will turn into small secret fire ants.

The brown green arteries of flood will sweep
away
The shadows solid as stop signs in the street,
Imposing sea-searched ways and their retorts,
That uterine the still born infant of the wheat;

The brown and frozen floods of ice-black soil,
Crowning their fiery teeth into the mire
Bring forth the shatters of the dew bright earth
And yet cannot spin round the sphere's renewal.

Children in dust slanted window light
Trace out their futures on the grass bright globe
Across the lined and Morse-coded shapes,

All of bright colors, Christmas packages
Of travel and adventures and a purse of gold,
And hope much like an endless Chinese box.

The yellow floods the river's banks and dim brown
Clover puddles in swamps filled up with mud cattails
Long as alder wands and dun-deer brush;
Some lemon yellow tree leaves flick blue sky;

Pencil lead white clouds strain out the light
That slants through crevices; the river flows;
It flows so powerfully: water black as oil,
Not curled with white crest spurts but muddy fern.

The green is broken over black rocks in the sun
And pours out sluices to four clover foam
That dissipates its chances in the stream.

Burning sun river now obscured with cloud
You are the deer upon the hills, squirrels' black-eyed
mania,
The wood chuck's lumpy run, the sun's wide opening.

The bright sun drops its water to the day
And fills the green channels of the city up;
The flowers take the luminous and tearing
Rain, filling roots into the earth's spasms.

The grass fills with the green necks
Of beer bottles dumping their water
And their geodesic foam, a million plants
And insects can thrive there, for urine

Fortified with beer, bestows the world.
Night of the earth and night of any earth,
Silent enigma our footsteps echo in,

Filled by the rain, a good hard rain,
You are no longer earth, but something...
Something that we tentatively balance on.

Music of plum breeze, sky cumuli of white,
Fill the aqua background of the deep sunset;
The rift of time is splitting like an eye
That has the light of razors put to it.

Blood of the near sun and the fever flush
Along and through the bramble of the trees,
Fill the not yet fallen snow crystals
With mercury, mercurochrome, and with lead,

Marks of a deeper substance, heavier, strange.
The earth that turns and ripens, rots to its core;
The cars of empty roads give out some hope --

And do not say 'give us', since we are also
Denizens of the underwater life,
Breathing thin oxygen through serrated eyes.

The tree becomes the bird that soaks the rain
Into its leaves; every eye of the bright bird
Is burning wet with water; a desert's endless sand,
The opal cloud of moon dust rises up

To mark a face upon each bearded leaf,
And wind will nudge through like a market crowd
Looking for places not to stand but move,
Deep in the arteries, searching for the heart.

The tallest tree to heaven cannot rise
Amid the circuit of the clouds, angels
And holy radiance meet it halfway,

And every eye and every musiced ear
The tree conceives, a sun-filled swaying womb,
Must still be clamoring, a paradox to earth.

Take out the amber from the tiger's eye
And fill it with the womb of empty space,
Strip the green fig tree from its flowered bush
And magnify the apple seven times.

The serpent's double tongue will wrap the globe
And follow every road into the north,
There where its ancient signifying land
Will give a heaven to its time-marked tomb.

On waking let the serpent speak its words
Into the heedless hapless world for starters,
Then yawn its jaws into the gates of heaven.

Or hell: it matters little in the end:
The breaking burning coil of the earth,
White dust a thistle blown to freezing space.

The black rain fills the slanted windy air
And crows are like burnt paper from the hills;
The perfume rises from your burning hair,
Invisible Gorgon of depopulated night.

I drink the poison from the rimless cup,
And yet it is all waiting , predestined,
Shining in the dark that sows green stars,
Marking the spaces of dawn's flooded fields.

The perfume rises from your burning hair,
And I am set on fire by the flames.
The child set within your womb-like chest

Is staring at the world with egg-shaped eyes,
Considering the blue salt floods of fate,
Although it cannot know them, scarcely guess.

The rain is needles in the black-sheathed night
That's broken into stars like a piranha's jaws;
The endless throat and tunnel of space-time
Is poised to swallow the green fate of earth.

The man upon a ledge looks up, not down;
He looks into the blackness where the streaks
Of star-seeds blossom into red, and where
He will be going if he has the balls.

Darkest celestial night, deep cave of fate,
Unknown, unknowable diverticula
Leading the whole way. Or are they following?

And you the draughtsman of your scoop of light
In which you neither lead, nor which you follow,
The melting light that is your unknown life.

Softer than roses, roses some of them,
The beauty of vaginas is more lovely
Than the loveliest flowers, than the bluest skies,
Than music, perfect of comparisons --

The bodied, disembodied, and yet both --
As perfect and as smooth in their own way,
Deepest flowering that nothing can disturb,
Existing in its own realm, quite apart,

Flowing as water flows, clinging without gap
Or any pauses, holding, one moment
Leading with no effort to another,

Different yet the same, a rising stretch
Of valleys and of hills, perhaps, but gradually more steep,
Until the civil is quite left behind, and then something
graver touched upon.

This rose of roses, a light of deepest dye,
Daily we put you in a glass of water
For it is only this way that we hold your life
And keep it near us, pointing us the way;

Dante in paradise beheld the Rose,
But even his transcendent power of mind
Could not do justice to the thing he saw,
For he had seen a miracle, given

To few and fewer mortals of the earth;
A light of roses and a rose of light,
Its petal angels rising to the heights

Where mortal vision cannot penetrate,
Where mortal thought is lost in radiance
And where the mind is stricken beyond sight.

Beauty of roses, more than beautiful,
Opening anemones of red and white,
And yet your center can't be found,
Petal on petal, nothingness is there,

Only a whirlpool round a crown of gold,
A small crown, since your kingdom is so small --
Kingdom of beauty, smallest that there is,
Or else it is the largest in the world;

And yet that seems unlikely, ugliness
And cruelty break their swords upon the night;
It's difficult to say which one is worse.

And yet the rose, its silky soft curved petals,
So delicate, has remained so long.
These things have triumphed, will continue to.

The curved belly of the black guitar is like
The belly of the plum, amber colored pit
Opens to the yellow lilies of the spring's blue white,
Filling the dark cave with firelit memory.

Music is a fire of the blood; my time is coming,
But the crossed oak trees will flood the water
Of this echoing name far down among the black
Purse strings of my mirrored counterparts.

The lunar flask is burning high above,
Pouring its absinthe stars into the drunken night;
The streets are lacquered with my vomit's blood,

And lemon slices of the others' eyes
Spit out sharp acid toward my impassive face;
I will not drink black ink no matter what they do.

The calyx of the lilies holy scent
Is filled with flashing water and the sky is blue
With green reflections of the newest grass;
The light of two moons holds the silent sun.

The stars are stilled within the burnt out bones
The zodiac has sequestered in its fire
Where the taxidermied influence of light
Has stricken every set and every stage.

A dry and emptied wave cannot bring forth
The salt shells of the old night's tides;
The tines of the god's forks cannot bear it.

The tines of all the forks squeak empty plates
And all the unburned locks open the sea
To fill all heavens with no flood or air.

The scent of your body is not a scent but warmth,
And if it is a scent it's like a fruit
Warmed on a windowsill in the summer sun
Still carrying the smell of soil, of vines and leaves,

Still carrying the freshness of the air itself
Saturated with the warmth of the hot sun,
A sun so different from the half-shaded sill,
Filled with a power, even with a threat;

Yet what could your body be if not a threat?
Graceful in movement , and yet watchful too,
Watchful in every part, in every limb,

Filled with the power of a gaze, and yet itself
A gaze with its own luminous dark touch
That tenderly traces, and can't leave things whole.

The yellow half-moon slides into your smile
And watermelon seeds are in your teeth;
You spit them out but green vines with zucchini
Grow in their place. Your breasts are two peaches,

Not that big but round and soft and warm
And juicy firm, flowing with honey and with sugar spice
And every breath you take is like a menthol
Cigarette, fragrant, poisonous, and warm.

Not poisonous exactly but not really safe;
How dangerous your touches are to me,
Even the slightest ones, a mere soft slide

Along my forearm, gives me all tingles.
It's women that should have these things, not men.
Yet I'm a man. And you, just what are you?

The book that flutters through the pages of the sun
Reaches its tendrils through the bluest space
Filling the platinum filaments of heat and light
With yellow flowers and green grapes and plums.

The apple that seduced eve banished here,
The hanging garden of the phallic moon
Drops tears of burning rain into the lake
That shines like silver in the blue green night.

The steps that aim the sun across the sky
Leave hieroglyphic markings on the daylight moon
And empty sockets where five eyes had been.

Crumble the light into my waiting palms;
The sun will freeze as bright as any day
In winter when the white wheat combs the wind.

The yellow scotch pours from the drunken moon.
It smiles and then it staggers in the sky,
A man with just a head, black tuxedo made of stars,
Two oak root hands that reach into the sea

And hold the harbor's mud as black as oil
Or a black onyx ring, the ring they took from Jesus
When he died. The black sky broke into a shit earthquake,
The moon was a violet purple like a bruise

And blood like hemorrhages of Jupiter you see
On maps of boys' rooms when they think
That they'll be scientists instead of truck drivers,

Or possibly much worse, though I don't know
If you can get very much worse than that.
The traffic's violence soaks blood without cease.

Round breasts of women and their skin so soft,
Black silken perfume flowing from their dresses,
Slim white melting candles in their panties
Warming their two legs like small fireplace logs

Gathered from a beach, the blue green of copper
Flickering the room and soft red lights
That do not mean what others think they do:
You are the virgin of the fireplace,

Holy of holies, yet without your clothes.
Radiantly naked, you are even more precious.
This is your real self; the webbing of the streets

No longer holds you in its dusty threads,
Full of amber sucked dry moths, the dead
That still can shiver, all just barely, in the wind.

Beautiful black trees moving in the wind,
Staggering their topmost crowns like deep seaweed
Or like a deadly drunken man whose hair
Is fingered and then tousled by the night.

They say the lord protects both drunks and fools.
The rain like pumpkin seeds is thick and heavy
And so icy cold; I just have to get out of it
Or else I'm going to die. Blue loss of blood.

Gold coins are just beyond the corner
And brown barley bread; vegetable soup
With beans and carrots and white grains of rice.

My soul was white once. And yet should a man
Wander the streets at night, nowhere to go,
Nothing to eat, and not a glass of water for his thirst?

Green fire in the frozen apple trees
Floods the hoarfrost grass with white deer eyes
That widen deeply through star-clouded nights
And slowly turn to green and then to brown.

The heart the beats inside the pockmarked earth
Is torn up by their hooves; farmers kill them,
Preferring the white shield of the winter moon.
And I have seen their bodies gutted blue.

The other frozen eyes that populate the night
Are waiting for their lashes to unthaw,
Like snow-iced eaves of roofs, then ripen soft

As berries in the summer of the year --
Multitudes of eyes, green and red and black,
Some small, some human, some wide as the spring night.

A moment works in enigmatic ways,
Gone as soon as there, the lighted room
Holding the door between us just open
And then just closing it an instant more.

A look is not enough, the body must be there
And yet it is in only the most nebulous ways,
A structure that you half remark within,
Around, yourself, a moving thing,

And nonetheless, what is this motion? Here, and there.
Moments intervene, yet do not convey,
For only I convey -- my hand, my arm, my leg --

But what is that -- convey? -- gathering,
A dual momentum in itself: half to change,
The other half to stay, the body peripherally, dimly gathers
mind.

Hearing your laughter through the sparkling woods
I followed the blond hayricks of the moon
Leading me through the purple countryside
Etched with huge stars, the broken things of light;

They let us ride a long time in the back.
Where was the driver? Where was anyone?
The girl who lay beside me was all soft
And golden in the night, and warm;

Then gradually she got so hot the hay
Was starting to burn brown and black, much like
A cigarette, but there was no flame.

Her eyes were green as grass, her teeth
Were brown as dried corncobs. I had to get away.
She wrapped me in her long arms as I slept.

When I close my eyes I see my dreams
Of black space and of deeper night
Full of the tall trees standing round my bed.
Their leaves are showered down on me

As I look up through the charred branches
Like squid tentacles, lesions up and down,
And then a white frost coats the tree with webs,
And I am taken into its black arms.

Although I am absorbed by the wood grain,
It feels warm inside. I see green particles like stars
And brown blood vessels branching through the wood's

Increasingly soft and porous sponge-like flesh.
And then there were green eyes that opened, closed,
Then opened even wider once again, and closed.

Print every Sutra on a gain of wheat,
Make every Bible of a bamboo tree.
The clouds move spectrally across the sky
As though from west to east or east to west.

The sun is stilled in heaven; the earth has stopped.
The numbers racing on our faces now
Have the eyes, the noses, the cheekbones
Of each other; like shadows in a room.

And then the dreams of napalm came to me,
Dreams of white phosphorous. And needle
Fragmentation ordinance so fine.

Sun of the tiger fur of fields striped with gold
And wine dark red, we will be there one day.
With golden daffodils floating above the ground.

The angels of the lord move up and down
The golden turning ladder of the sun.
Life is the diamond ring, or maybe jade,
But death is the coveted black onyx prize.

Death is the panther in the dark room
That you cannot see; death is the powder,
Purest white, you contemplate, it's the loss
Of everything you have achieved, the thought

Of everything you failed to achieve, the dream
Of everything you wanted but could not;
The mirror showing you the wrinkled skin;

The photograph showing you drought-spidered earth,
Death, your desire to go there and to do;
Death your final indolence, your lack of home.

The roses on the garage's espalier
Are yellow roses, always my favorite;
Now I say farewell to things that do not fare,
Whether well or ill. They are the things of earth.

They have no mind we know of, no destiny;
Fate must come from a deep presentiment
And this from deep within self-sensing mind.
Unless the roses in their swirled darkness

Can delicately sense themselves somehow.
They always have been the strangest of all flowers.
Swirl upon swirl of darkness, silken, obscure,

An image of what some of us must be,
Even if privately, and therefore all,
Except that some must do it all for good.

Bluest of gentians, deep rose of all lilacs --
The night is not more deep than your star's fall;
O no it is the sliding of a single drop
Where rain made a sparkling diamond for your dark.

How can you be a part of all the earth
That is itself so dark, sometimes not beautifully;
You are the blackness that we long to have,
The deepest ocean of our final sleep.

For you have promised each of us pure rest,
Yet not in a despairing way but – sheer wonder!
How can your color be so rich and deep?

How can your depths of darkness still speak forth
Your luminous, incomparable shine?
Gazing into you, strangely, all fears are stilled.

The black fire of your hair is full of dormant wishes.
They must gather to your heart and overflow
In passion and in memory, in hope and fear;
A silent waterfall of dreams is falling there.

Your visions are held captive by the spells
That took root in the deep well of your being –
Sometimes, long ago, or yesterday: gather
The bright mud clinging to your eyes and brow,

Smear it like excrement beneath your foot,
Reduce it all to ash and smear it on my face,
Calligraphy and portents, archaic syllables

And yet the needed ones. Walk out then toward
The night possessed and stark, depopulated
Quadrants of the city, finding what you dream.

AFTERWORD

Encounters With the Author in Taipei

We first made the author's acquaintance at a well-known restaurant in Taipei, the Wysteria Tea House, famous as having been a meeting place for dissident intellectuals in the years of political struggle in Taiwan .

During the recent effort to publish his rather extensive work, we had occasion to discuss aspects of his past and current writing.

Your poetry is quite varied in style and in form. Where do you locate yourself in the overall debate concerning poetic form?

I consider myself an eclectic. The main thing for me is to grasp, mentally, a certain object -- that is, an experience, a scene, an event -- to see it and feel it. Any language that seems to convey the reality of that is good, any which remains merely language, merely words, is for me of no interest, in some cases it is actively negative, in the sense of being obstructive.

A cliché?

Yes or not even a cliché but in a way worse than that. Much of our language obscures the nature of reality. Words in themselves are, in a sense, the enemy of writing. I tell students that all the time. Words most often merely convey the usual accepted social understanding. Writing is for the purpose of grasping reality itself, which is always something other than the social understanding.

Do you consider yourself a political writer?

All writing is political in the sense of attempting to correct these false social understandings. At times its purpose is to merely reveal with a new freshness, a perceptual freshness, as it were. But even this itself has a certain basic political significance, in the sense that awakened human beings will act and think differently than those who are at rest in the normal tranquilized non-perception that we usually are caught up in.

Does living outside the United States help or hinder your writing?

I think it helps, in general. It is in some ways a very undeveloped culture, yet in other ways it is overbearing. (The US, that is.) There is, for example, a great deal of rather stifling political correctness, as it's called, and to get away from that is itself a positive thing. For a while I had no idea how I would ever get all this material published, especially if you're not there trying to do all the "networking" that is needed, and which I was absolutely terrible at anyway -- worse than terrible, I really had no clue, I still don't, I suppose. And then it came about that you could just do it all by yourself, by means of the internet.

How much material is it? It's quite a lot, it would seem.

Yes, I guess it's about 40 volumes or so. Over 2,000 pages, if you want to measure it like that. I don't know how much it would weigh.

There seem to be many styles represented. Was that something you consciously strove for?

Yes. I always wanted to be able to represent a wide variety of experiences. My first models for the artist were people such as Picasso, Goethe, Bach -- artists who could work in a very wide range of forms and even use widely different styles. Of course, I can't compare myself to people like that, but it was still a goal, to try many types of things.

What sorts of things are you working on currently?

Well as you know I am trying to get all this existing work published, going through it, touching it up here and there, proofreading, and so forth. After that, I think I might return to some translating work -- Holderlin especially, and some Chinese poets, but don't ask me which ones.

All right, but can you say whether they are modern or classical?

Classical. My favorite is Mung Hao-Ren, actually.

There are many other things to talk about, but perhaps that's a good note to end on for now.

But what were you trying to do in these poems in particular?

I don't know how to answer that. I would just say that I think the reader will notice echoes of Dylan Thomas, Hart Crane, Keats, Shakespeare, and others. The book seems to occupy an intersection between Surrealism and Romanticism, a conjunction that many modern poets have worked, but in recent years perhaps few, at least in English.

Well at least you've given us a little clue.

Yes, a little one.

About the Author

Steven Frattali is an expatriate American writer living in Taipei. He is the author to date of over 40 volumes of poetry, totaling over 2,000 pages of work. He is also the author of several critical works, among them *Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost* and *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism*.

About the Banyan Press of Taipei

The Banyan Press of Taipei was founded in 2008 by Samuel Palmer and Steven Frattali. It plans to publish the work of expatriate Anglophone writers of the Pacific Rim who are working outside the norms of mainstream publishing. The Press does not at this time invite submissions, but it hopes to do so in the future.